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Inspiring Children's Futures

Access to Food, Health Care and Schooling During COVID-19: Providers' and Policymakers' Perspectives on Challenges, Causes, Impact on Children, and Responses

Summary of Findings

The International **COVID 4P Log Project**

Inspiring children's Futures

LEARNING SERIES | 6 FOOD, SCHOOL, HEALTH CARE

About the COVID 4P Log Project

COVID-19 has abruptly thrust the rights and wellbeing of children and families into greater risk around the world. The impact of COVID-19 on children continues to be vast. Risks posed to children's survival and development, to their special protections, education, health and access to food, for example, are being greatly compounded not only by COVID-19, but also by government responses.

With roughly a third of the global population estimated to be under age 18, children[1] account for a huge proportion of our population. Successful delivery of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (henceforth 'SDGs'), which relate to all ages, heavily relies on our ability to effectively and robustly respond to the distinct needs and rights of children. Even prior to COVID-19, our global task to achieve these global goals by 2030 seemed daunting. In the light of COVID-19, achieving the SDGs is even more challenging.

To effectively mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in the light of protecting children's wellbeing, and ultimately for our collective societal future, policy and practice responses must be distinctively designed to address children's wellbeing needs.

Policymakers, and those working with children, are at the heart of pandemic responses as they continue to support children's wellbeing, rise to many new challenges, and respond in new, innovative and, in some cases, unprecedented ways. To address the impact of COVID-19 on children in the long term, the **COVID 4P Log Project** sought to better understand the changing demands on these policies and practices across different cultures and contexts, in 22 countries and five continents.

The **Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures** is a joint initiative at the University of Strathclyde, Scotland, with a collective vision of ensuring that children and young people have what they need to reach their full potential, particularly those who face adversity.

We work in partnership with a wide range of partners nationally and internationally. Children's human rights and the UN Sustainable Development Goals are the heart of our work.

1. The term 'children' is used throughout to describe all those under the age of 18 years, in line with the CRC's definition of a child. Where 'young person' is used in the Report, this is reflecting that specific age group only.

THE SMARTPHONE APP

The COVID 4P Log is an Android and iOS smartphone app, free-of-cost to app users, that collected the real-time, anonymous views and experiences of practitioners and policymakers who were working across the globe to support children's wellbeing in the light of COVID-19. In answering a series of questions, these volunteer respondents helped us to better understand the ways practitioners and policymakers were responding to those challenges.

During the last quarter of 2020, practitioners and policymakers were invited to download the app to log a 2-minute response to one main question every day, for eight weeks. The questions were both practice and policy-focused, and based on the '4P' children's human rights framework of Protection, Provision, Prevention, and Participation, in order to better understand the ways practitioners and policymakers around the world were protecting children, providing for their unique needs, enabling their participation in decisions that affect them, and preventing harm, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESEARCH THEMES

The smartphone app explored respondents' views of several core areas:

1. Learning from the pandemic so far
2. Protection: Ending violence against children
3. Provision: Access to food, health, education
4. Collaborations, flexibility, transparency and trust: Applying evidence from past emergencies to COVID-19
5. Prevention: Children's social and emotional wellbeing
6. Special considerations: Justice, alternative care and disabilities
7. Participation: Responding to #COVIDUnder19-children and young people's findings
8. Preparing to rebuild post-COVID

OUR KEY PARTNERS

Our 17 international Key Partners range from capacity-building organisations, to international advocacy NGOs and service delivery partnerships, to the UN and other inter-governmental agencies. Their support and close engagement enabled the **Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures** to gather these important insights through the COVID 4P Log smartpone app. Their mention here does not imply endorsement of these findings.

African Child Policy Forum ACPF
AFRICAN PARTNERSHIP to End Violence against Children
BARNAFRID - Swedish National Center on Violence Against Children LINKÖPING UNIVERSITY
CYCNET
DEFENCE FOR CHILDREN INTERNATIONAL
European Social Network
Child Rights Coalition Asia
FICE
child rights connect
Observatory of CHILDREN'S HUMAN RIGHTS Scotland
National Child Welfare Workforce Institute LEARNING, LEADING, CHANGING
OECD INCLUSIVE GROWTH
REPSSI Psychosocial Wellbeing For All Children
University of Strathclyde Glasgow
Terre des hommes Helping children worldwide.
OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN
PATHFINDERS FOR PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES Justice for Children Justice for All
GLOBAL SOCIAL SERVICE WORKFORCE ALLIANCE

PROTECTION
PROVISION
PARTICIPATION
PREVENTION

For the wellbeing of our *children*

Children's human rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are sometimes summarised as the four P's: Protection, Provision, Participation and Prevention. The COVID 4P Log uses this 4P conceptual framework to frame the questions we asked practitioners and policymakers. While the 4Ps are not all-encompassing, they offer an accessible lens through which to explore how practitioners and policymakers from different countries, sectors and organisations see children's human rights being realised.

We asked about good practices, and innovations despite the challenges, that ensured children's human rights were upheld across key aspects of children's lives, in particular those of children whose rights are most vulnerable to being violated. In this project, we explore how practitioners and policymakers are upholding the 4Ps, with the following areas of focus:

PROTECTION

We explore children's rights to protection from exploitation, violence and other abuses, and to effective and child-friendly interventions if these occur. Our questions seek to understand what concrete and effective measures have been enacted to protect children from violence during the pandemic.

PROVISION

We explore children's rights to growth and development, including the right to food, health care and education, play and leisure, and provision of targeted assistance—including economic assistance—to families. We also ask about the special considerations for children living in exceptionally difficult conditions, in particular for children involved in justice systems, in alternative care, and with disabilities.

PARTICIPATION

We explore a child's right to express their views freely, and to have their views given due weight when decisions are made that affect them. Children's participation and intergenerational partnerships are essential ingredients for understanding the impact of COVID-19 on children's wellbeing.

PREVENTION

We explore children's rights to social and emotional wellbeing support. Isolation under COVID-19 has been a common reality for many, and social exclusion of children can undermine their wellbeing. Supporting children's social and emotional wellbeing, and that of their families, can prevent further harms.

Report Summary:

Providers' and Policymakers' Perspectives on Ensuring Children's Access to Food, Health Care and Schooling During COVID-19

This report presents the findings from the analysis of the COVID 4P Log responses about providers' and policymakers' perspectives on, and first-hand experiences with, practices to realise children's rights by meeting children's and families' basic needs – such as ensuring access to food and basic necessities, health care, economic security and education.

The data presented here were collected in the last quarter of 2020.

This is a summary report. The full report is available at https://inspiringchildrensfutures.org/publications.

This report aims to generate new insights, and spark new questions and ideas, to inform, equip and strengthen policy, service and practices for and with children and their families. This report is part of a series of Learning Reports documenting the COVID 4P Log App findings from responses across the eight weeks of questions

This COVID 4P Log Learning Report Series aims to inform and equip those who seek to 'respond to children's distinct needs, and realise their full range of rights and opportunities, to achieve peaceful, just and inclusive societies for all'.all'. [2]

2. Davidson, J.; Elsley, S.; Giraldi, M.; Goudie, A.; Hope, K.; Lyth, A.; Van Keirsbilck, B. (June 2019): Justice for Children, Justice for All: The Challenge to Achieve SDG16+ Call to Action. Glasgow: CELCIS - Inspiring Children's Futures, University of Strathclyde. https://www.justice.sdg16.plus/justiceforchildren

Key Messages:
Scale and Impact of Children's Restricted Access to Essential Goods and Services During COVID-19

This Learning Report details the responses logged via the COVID 4P Log smartphone app by 72 service providers and policymakers from 10 countries during the last quarter of 2020. Kenya, the Philippines and South Africa had the highest number of respondents in this report. Those responses were logged during Week 3 of the eight-week survey.

Rising Injustices and Concerns about Children's Safety and Development

Collectively, the responses testified to children's **worsened access** to basic necessities, health care and education as a result of COVID-19. This had resulted in a **multitude of negative outcomes** for children – for example:

- Food and economic insecurity;
- Malnourishment
- Heightened exposure to COVID-19 risk
- Reduced help-seeking
- Missed health checks
- Unsupervised exposure to potentially unsafe online content
- Widened inequalities in the access to education
- Family stress, and many others.

The negative consequences of children's restricted access to schooling were particularly well detailed by our respondents and ranged from **widened learning gaps, poorly affected socio-emotional development and loneliness**, to **missing out on regular meals, unwanted pregnancies** and the **exposure to other risks** – in the community and online.

A wide range of exacerbating factors at various levels were cited as contributing to those injustices:

- **At the country and policy levels:** The lack of capacity and resources; inadequate governmental responses; poverty; inflation; lockdowns; school closures; unequal access to digital technologies; and others;
- **At the organisational (e.g. health, education and welfare systems) level:** Staff shortages and resignations; under-preparedness for remote teaching; under-preparedness to deliver mental health services remotely; sub-optimal communication and coordination among institutions;
- **At the community level:** Rising COVID-19 infection rates; COVID-19 fear hindering help-seeking;
- **At the family level:** Increases in domestic violence; job loss and family pressures.

Alongside the numerous challenges, diverse examples of effective responses were also reported in a number of areas, particularly:

- **Relief distribution and livelihood support** – for example, food packs; urban gardening support and other livelihood projects; cash transfers and business boosts; and meal programmes in schools;
- **Awareness-raising, signposting and empowerment** – for example, caregiver empowerment to encourage use of locally available resources; hospital appointment support; 'experimental advocacy'; and influencing policies;
- **Communication and coordination** – for example, telephone visits; and the dissemination of child-friendly materials on COVID-19;
- **Educational and social engagement** – for example, youth clubs; safe outdoor activities; and educational support by child and youth care workers.

Those initiatives and adaptations had resulted in **positive outcomes** for children and families such as reaching children in need of food assistance; supporting households economically and reducing poverty and gender-based violence; starting up long-term programmes; and others.

When asked about what actions should be prioritised to redress those restrictions, respondents stressed:

- **The need for more effective government and system responses** - including more funding allocated, less corruption, better coordination between statutory and non-statutory organisations, better planning, better communication with households and community leaders;
- **Mobilising additional cadres and services in proportion to the need;**
- **Ensuring the health and the education systems are better prepared for emergencies;**
- **Ensuring connectivity and access to Internet technologies for all;**
- **More targeted programmes for children who are most severely affected by the pandemic;**
- Other priorities such as **parental support, further research into child poverty and vaccinations**.

Summary of Findings:

Restrictions on Essential Rights: Severity, Impact and Responses

70%

28 (70%) respondents shared children had had less access to FOOD as a result of COVID-19

Challenges

- Respondents reported a web of challenges to ensuring children's food, health care and education provision during the COVID-19 pandemic in their countries and areas of work.
- The most commonly cited barriers were a range of pandemic-induced challenges (such as infection rates, movement restrictions, school closures, job loss and increases in gender-based and domestic violence) and wider structural injustices (such as poverty, inflation, the lack of capacity and resources and various inequities).

Causes and Consequences of the Inadequate Provision for Children

- Delayed and/or inadequate government responses often deepened the inequities in the access to income and other basic necessities, and further contributed to children's and families' unmet needs and exclusion.
- Children in street situations, children with disabilities, economically disadvantaged children, children needing medical interventions, orphaned children, and several other groups were reported to be among the most severely impacted groups.

91%

31 (91%) respondents stated children had experienced restricted access to SCHOOLING as a result of COVID-19

Adapting Practice

- Most respondents had adapted their practice to mitigate some of those challenges. Common examples of such responses were the distribution of basic necessities and provision of sustenance support; awareness-raising and signposting; financial assistance; technology-enhanced communication with families; organised school support and recreational activities for children; and advocacy.
- Implementing and sustaining those innovative practices were often challenging, however, due to limited resources, capacity and coordination.
- To better address children's needs during COVID-19, respondents urged that more effective government responses be put in place – including more basic needs support; that additional cadres and services be mobilised; that more collaboration between stakeholders take place; and that connectivity and access to technologies be secured for all. The importance of supportive policies was also underscored.

71%

24 (71%) respondents reported children had experienced more restrictions in the access to HEALTH CARE

Economic Assistance Initiatives

- 63% (12) of respondents who completed this question stated targeted economic assistance had been made available during the pandemic.
- Cash transfers, business boosts, supermarket vouchers and other economic strengthening schemes during the pandemic were reported.
- A range of positive impacts of economic assistance initiatives were reported – including reductions in poverty, inequalities and gender-based violence, and increased access to education.

Summary of Findings:

Food and Basic Necessities, Health Care and Schooling

51%

18 (51%) of respondents were ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with the measures taken to address children’s limited access to food and other basic necessities, compared to 9 (26%) who were ‘dissatisfied’.

46%

13 (46%) of respondents were ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with how healthcare provision had adapted during the pandemic, compared to 6 (21%) who were ‘dissatisfied’.

39%

9 (39%) respondents were ‘dissatisfied’ with how the education provision had adapted, compared to 6 (26%) who were ‘satisfied’.

Access to Food and Other Basic Necessities

To increase children’s access to food, respondents reported a range of effective initiatives – primarily relief distribution, economic assistance, urban gardening and livelihood projects, meal programmes in schools and awareness-raising and empowerment.

In some cases, however, not all children were reached and the provision was not enough to meet their needs.

Access to Health Care

Children’s restricted access to health care during the pandemic had resulted in receiving inadequate or no medical care; delays in routine appointments; the continued underserving of rural regions; and issues such as malnourishment and mental health problems remaining unattended.

Despite efforts made to ensure the safety and quality of the healthcare provision, inadequate government responses and limited capacity and supplies often resulted in unmet health needs. Movement restrictions, limited information and COVID-19 infection fears had further hindered help-seeking.

Access to Schooling

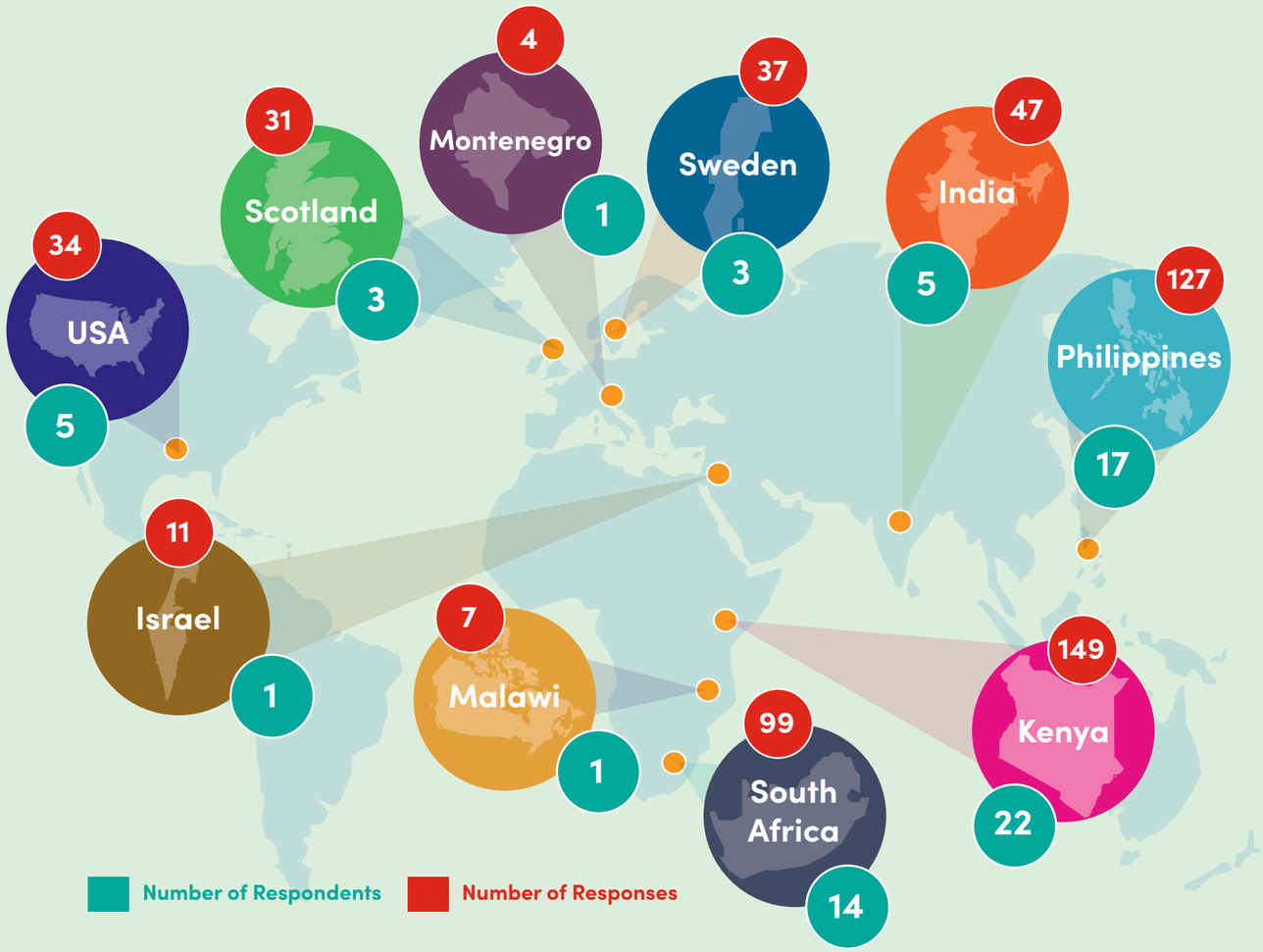
The reported consequences of the limited access to schooling during COVID-19 were numerous, severe and far-reaching. According to respondents, school closures had violated children’s rights to education, food and play and recreation; endangered their safety; widened inequities; and resulted in learning gaps.

The restricted access to schooling was also reported to have poorly affected children’s social, cognitive and emotional development and mental wellbeing.

Inadequate resources, poor educational infrastructures and the inequities in families’ access to technology hindered efforts to ensure equal and full access to education for all children.

Respondents and Countries Represented in this Report

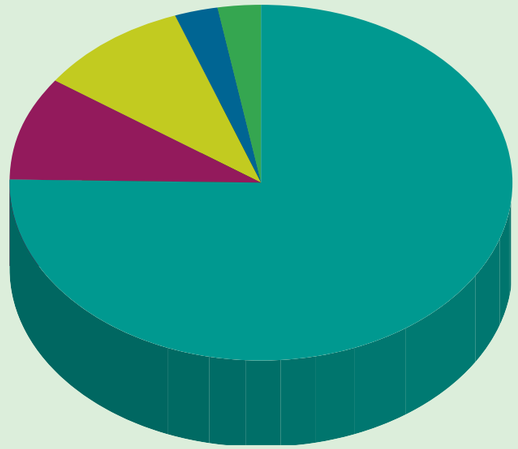
546 responses from 72 respondents across 10 countries and 4 continents



The findings in this Learning Report are based on 546 responses from 72 respondents - including 40 direct service providers, 23 service managers and 9 policymakers (48 women; 21 men; 3 - prefer not to say).

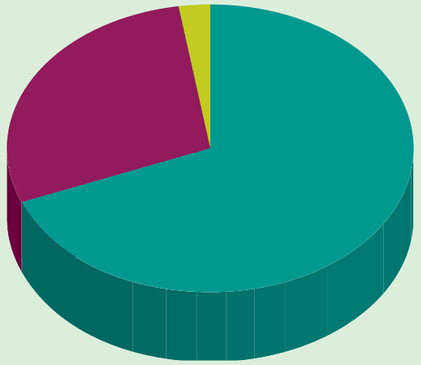
The respondents represented 10 countries:

India, Israel, Kenya, Malawi, the Philippines, Montenegro, South Africa, Sweden, Scotland and the USA.



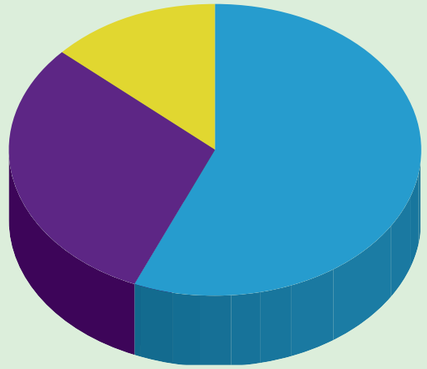
Respondents by Organisation

NGO	54
Civil Society Organisation	7
Government	7
Private Sector	2
Unknown	2



Respondents by Gender

Women	48
Men	21
Prefer not to say	3



Respondents by Role

Direct Service Providers	40
Service Managers	23
Policymakers	9

Negative Impact of Structural Barriers on Children's Essential Rights During COVID-19

OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN

- Isolation
- Increased stress and depression
- Learning gaps
- Food insecurity
- Unattended health needs
- More safety concerns

OUTCOMES FOR FAMILIES AND SERVICES

- Family income and job loss
- Parental stress and conflict
- Resignations and staff shortages
- Overwhelmed health facilities
- Increases in gender-based and domestic violence
- Hindered help-seeking

BARRIERS AT LEGISLATIVE, SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND ORGANISATIONAL LEVELS

- Lack of capacity and resources
- Inadequate government responses
- Insufficient coordination between institutions and sectors
- Poverty
- Inflation
- Inequities in access to technology
- Lockdowns and movement restrictions
- COVID-19 infection rates
- School closures

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Scarce Resources and Deepening Inequities

"Food has been the most challenging because a lot of families had been retrenched and lost their jobs and not being able to get new jobs because of the pandemic. This has led to more food insecurity and poverty increased."

Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa

"The pandemic has created limits in those resources that were already limited. [...] The school systems themselves are struggling to stay afloat [...] This in turn creates more chaos for the children and families. [...] There are no winners in this situation as everyone is impacted. The few local charitable agencies that help with basic needs are depleted and have few avenues to restock. Some have shuttered their doors and are closed permanently due to the combination of a lack of available volunteers and a lack of donations.."

Service Manager, Government, USA

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Most Severely Impacted Groups of Children During COVID-19

Girls

Children with disabilities

Refugees

Roma children

Children deprived of a family environment

Children in need of medical interventions

Children receiving welfare support

Children in street situations

Children living in institutions

Children who are isolated

Children from low-income households

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Impact of Economic Assistance Measures on Children's Wellbeing

The following types of impact of the economic assistance measures were mentioned: decreasing poverty and inequalities and ensuring basic necessities such as food and fuel were provided for; 'improved lives'; 'transportation to school'; allowing children to access online education; reducing gender-based violence; livelihood support for families; and others.

'Through the provision of the cash transfer and the business boost, the children have had some of their basic needs met. This has also reduced the GBV cases caused by financial pressures.'
Service Manager, NGO, Kenya

'Ensuring food and fuel is available. Allowing children access to online education'
Policymaker, Government, Scotland

'Those who got it at least were able to meet basic needs for the family hence provision. These families also increased protection aspect as they do go out to look for ways to earn income. For long term prevention of children at risk, the caregivers started petty trading.'
Service Manager, NGO, Kenya

'Counteracts the inequality that is caused by the pandemic (economy, information on mother tongue'
Policymaker, Government, Sweden

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Responses to Children's Restricted Access to Food and Other Basic Necessities During COVID-19

'I'm dissatisfied because we don't have enough resources to cover the needs of affected families'

Direct Service Provider, Civil Society Organisation, Philippines

'The government is providing cash transfer program, however it is not enough.'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, Philippines

"Not all households benefited'

Service Manager, NGO, Kenya

'Caregiver empowerment on how to make use of locally available materials'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, Kenya

'The fact that when in crisis, people step up and do what they can to help those in need.'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa

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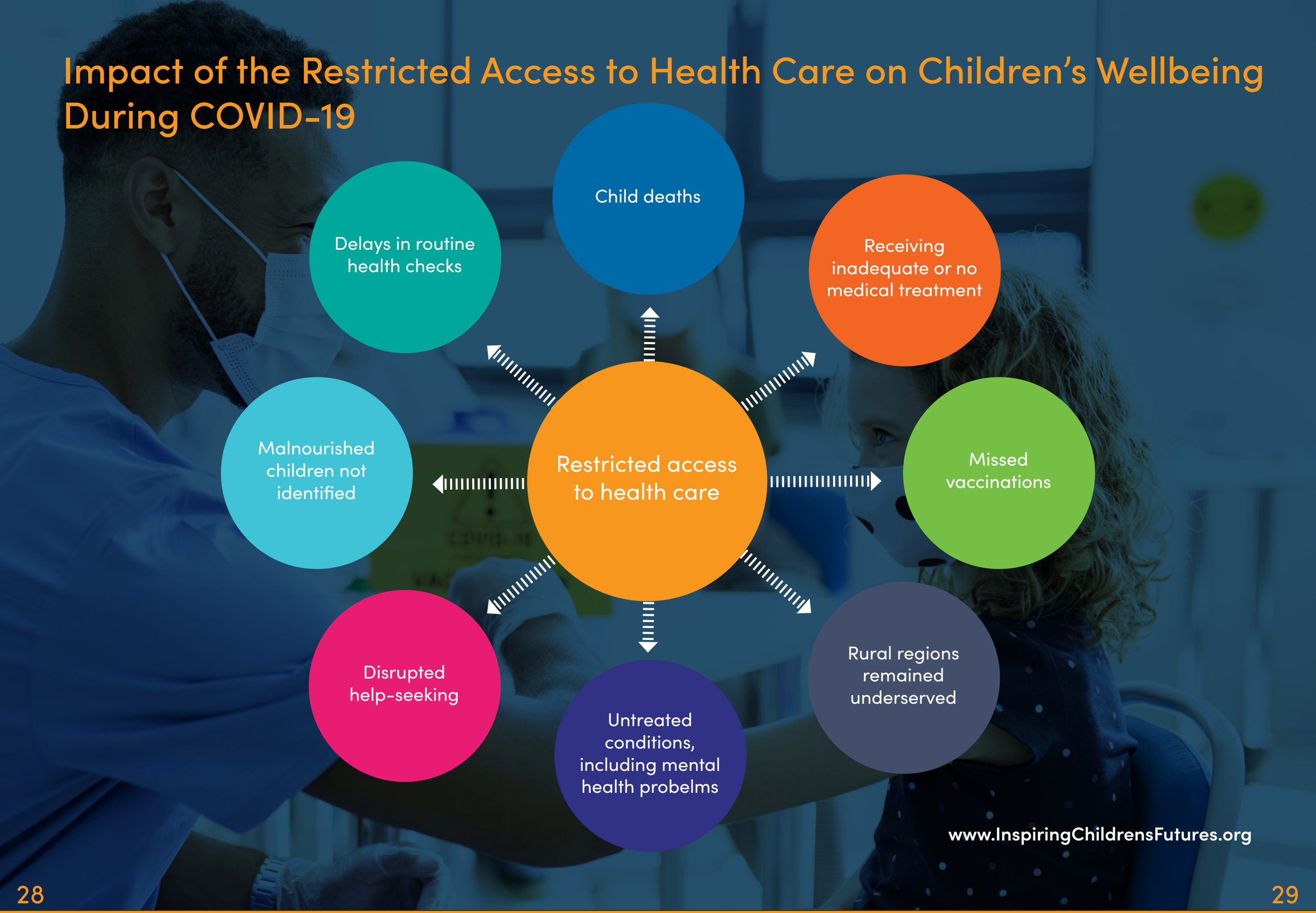
Impact of the Restricted Access to Health Care on Children's Wellbeing During COVID-19



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Children's Limited Access to Health Care During COVID-19

'Children may have untreated conditions. I think a pressing issue is access to mental health care, given that lockdown restrictions and anxiety around the pandemic may have exacerbated/prompted mental health difficulties.'

Policymaker, Government, Scotland

'Non urgent matters down prioritized. Poor information when regular controls will be offered. Some kids have soon been waiting for health checks almost 1 year'

Policymaker, Government, Sweden

'Mal nourished children have no been identified or helped out of mal nourishment'

Service Manager, NGO, India

'It's the measures and all the precautions that have been implemented by health care services. It was done quick and also managing resources to ensure not everything is wasted.'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa

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Impact of the Restricted Access to Schooling on Children's Safety, Wellbeing and Development

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Impact of School Disruptions

'Delayed educational attainment and social development.'

Policymaker, Government, Scotland

'It has affected child right to education, play time which contribute to their physical and emotional development. Most children cannot attend school.'

Service Manager, NGO, Kenya

'More isolation and accummulating learning gaps'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, Israel

'The online exposure to children is also having a negative effect on them, since they encounter adult content without supervision.'

Service Manager, NGO, Kenya

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A Note of Caution

While the survey generated useful insights into the respondents' work in relation to children and families, the findings should be interpreted with caution due to a number of factors.

- The numbers of respondents are modest, so the findings may not be representative of the experiences and challenges faced in those countries or sectors.
- The survey engaged practitioners and policymakers only. The findings may not reflect children's or their caregivers' views.
- The findings reported here have been produced by the COVID 4P Log research team and, due to the anonymised format of the smartphone app survey, the findings cannot be shared with the respondents for commentary or review.
- The findings are derived from a short-form survey and lack context. Respondents' engagement with the survey varied, which may have affected the completeness of the data.
- We are aware some respondents had difficulties with engaging with the app due to workload pressures and technical issues, which might have affected their response rates.

About this Report

This Learning Report has been produced by the Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures at the University of Strathclyde, Scotland, UK. **Inspiring Children's Futures**, with its many partners, has a strong track record of multi-level, multi-sector global engagement, policy development and practice improvement.

This Learning Report is part of a series of reports on the findings of the COVID 4P Log smartphone app survey. Together, the reports from this series form the second of a three-part 'Inspiring Children's Futures in Light of COVID-19' programme.

This programme is gathering evidence on protecting children's wellbeing in past epidemics; informing better policies and practices throughout the COVID-19 pandemic; and influencing change in the long shadow that COVID-19 will cast over the recovery phases ahead.

With our partners, we are strengthening global, national and local approaches to ensure that we are collectively delivering on the Justice for Children, Justice for All SDG 16+ Call to Action to "respond to children's distinct needs, and realise their full range of rights and opportunities, to achieve peaceful, just and inclusive societies for all". [3]

[3] https://www.justice.sdg16.plus/justiceforchildren

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